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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/CARC, G/TIP, AND DRL

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SUBJECT: GEORGIA LAUNCHES ANTI-TIP CAMPAIGN IN SVANETI

¶1. (U) As part of a national anti-trafficking awareness campaign, the Georgian Young Lawyers' Association (GYLA) - a USAID implementing partner - conducted consultations and distributed anti-TIP publications in the remote, mountainous border region of Svaneti from 27 July until 2 August. Rumors of possible TIP activity and involuntary servitude, stemming from the Government's actions to reassert control over this region last summer, led GYLA to conduct this portion of their national anti-TIP campaign "No to TIP" in Svaneti at this time.

¶2. (U) Two GYLA representatives targeted local village residents. During the consultations, the experts discussed trafficking issues, including characteristics and stages of trafficking, rights and responsibilities of TIP victims, and victim prevention. Svaneti is an area of anti-TIP concern in Georgia, due to the isolation of the province and the region's tradition of "kords meribi" or "white servants." This tradition, which has existed since Soviet times but increased since the 1992-93 civil war, is a labor practice wherein a family takes in a house servant in exchange for food and shelter. These servants may be displaced people who choose to stay and work. Or, they may be held against their will in involuntary servitude, as slaves. Despite a mostly warm reception by the villagers, the GYLA representatives were unable to directly speak with any of these servants. Most of the villagers would only speak about the servant tradition in a circumspect manner, with none admitting to employing any themselves. In addition to targeting residents, the GYLA representatives also briefed local police on recently enacted anti-TIP legislation and GYLA's USAID-funded prevention materials.

¶3. (SBU) Comment: The extension of anti-TIP education programs to the remote and under-served region of Svaneti represents another step forward in Georgia's ongoing fight against human trafficking. GYLA's demonstrated expertise and leadership in combating TIP, in partnership with Georgian civil society, continues to bolster the GoG's efforts to eradicate this scourge. Svaneti remains a largely closed society, where law enforcement is difficult and suspicion of outsiders reigns supreme. Due to the mountainous terrain and road conditions, Svaneti lies approximately 12 hours by car from the capital. Lying on the Russian border, it is vulnerable to trafficking and insulated from intervention efforts. End comment.
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